DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 158 FL 015 987

AUTHOR Saville-Troike, Muriel
TITLE Training Teachers to Develop the Academic Competence of LEP Students.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 6p.; In: English Language Development. Proceedings of a Conference on Issues in English Language Development for Minority Language Education (Arlington, VA, July 24, 1985); see FL 015 974.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Development; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); *Limited English Speaking; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Education; *Teacher Role; *Teaching Skills

ABSTRACT

The areas of knowledge, abilities, and attitudes essential to bilingual, English-as-a-second-language, and mainstream teachers in developing the academic competence of limited-English-speaking students are outlined. The areas of knowledge include linguistic and applied linguistic concepts, reading and writing processes, instructional resources, state and local curriculum requirements and guidelines, scope and sequence of all content areas being taught to the students, curriculum design principles, and major research studies in these areas. Abilities include communication skills, appropriate use of teaching strategies for different students, interpretation of student linguistic progress, organization of learners for different purposes, asking appropriate questions at various levels of abstraction, helping students respond to different demands and apply appropriate skills, and selecting and adapting materials and methods. Attitudes include sincere interest in the education of students of varying abilities, backgrounds, and personalities, sensitivity to curriculum and materials biases and deficiencies, and flexibility in using teaching strategies. (MSE)

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ED273158

FL 015-987

Training Teachers To Develop the Academic Competence of LEP Students

Muriel Saville-Troike

Looking through the literature on what a student needs to know to succeed in school, i.e., what constitutes academic competence, we find that such competence is generally defined in terms of *skills* and *strategies*, certain types of *knowledge*, and *attitudes* toward learning. Language skills required for the attainment of high academic competence include the ability to decode and encode meaning in context-reduced tasks (especially reading and writing) and to use language as a tool in acquiring knowledge and in performing analytic processes. Strategies include listening or reading for the main point, outlining and summarizing information, making comparisons and contrasts, generalizing, making logical inferences from known information, and constructing schemata. The knowledge referred to is seldom of language per se, unless it is in a language arts or English class dealing with grammar. For elementary and secondary school students, what matters is primarily conceptual knowledge and schemata in such curricular areas as mathematics, science, social studies, and history. The most obviously important aspect of language for the development of these concepts is vocabulary, followed by the means for the expression of semantic relationships. The requisite attitude for academic success is a variable construct in many respects, but, as a minimum, it must include a disposition on the part of the student to make efforts at conscious and intentional learning and the belief that these efforts can make a difference.

While a student's academic competence is influenced to a great extent by factors outside of the school's control, such as personality, inherent intelligence, prior social experiences, parental attitudes and behaviors, and culture—such competence is also one aspect of development about which we can say teaching really does make a difference. The question to be addressed here is how teacher training may contribute to the academic competence of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students.

In table 1 (see page 116), I have listed the teacher qualifications that I believe are likely to be most important for developing the academic competence of LEP students in the categories of knowledge, abilities, and

Table 1

Teacher Qualifications Relevant to All Three Groups of Teachers Involved with LEP Students: Bilingual, ESL, and Mainstream*

Knowledge

- The nature of language, and language change and diversity.
- The interrelationships of language and cognitive development.
- Theories of first and second language acquisition/learning and their implications for the classroom.
- Effects of cultural and socioeconomic factors (both of majority and minority groups) on students' learning styles (cognitive and affective) and on students' general level of development and socialization.
- Linguistic, rhetorical, and stylistic concepts that furnish useful ways of understanding and talking about the substance, structure, development, and manner of expression in written and oral discourse.
- Processes by which one learns to read and write.
- Instructional resources (including educational technology) and varied sources of information that will help students understand—through intellect and imagination—the subjects and issues they are studying.
- State and local curriculum requirements and guidelines.
- Scope and sequence of content in all subjects being concurrently studied by the students.
- Problems faced and procedures used by teachers and educational leaders in designing curricula in English for students of different ages, abilities, and cultural/linguistic backgrounds.
- Major research studies on the relation of language acquisition to academic development in children and adults, on reading, on processes of composing, and on building of curricula for different kinds of students in different settings.

Abilities

- Communicating effectively.

*Selected and adapted primarily from teacher training guidelines developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics (1974) and the National Council of Teachers of English (1976).

- Using teaching strategies appropriate to distinct learning modes and developmental levels.
- Identifying, assessing, and interpreting student progress in all language skills, particularly those relevant to academic content and performance.
- Organizing groups of learners for a variety of purposes appropriate for language development (for example, discussion, creative problem solving, composing, and commenting on compositions) and enhancing peer teaching and learning.
- Asking questions (at varying levels of abstraction) that elicit facts, opinions, and judgments appropriate to the subject, the occassion, and the student's level of language competence.
- Helping students respond appropriately to the differing demands (particularly academic) of speech and writing in different contexts and for different audiences and purposes, and developing students' level of metalinguistic awareness.
- Helping both beginning and maturing readers apply varied techniques to improve reading comprehension and inferencing abilities.
- Helping students learn to listen effectively for information and for understanding.
- Helping students identify and weigh facts, implications, inferences, and judgments in both spoken and written discourse.
- Selecting and adapting materials and methods in accordance with:
  (1) Suitability to each student's language proficiency and cultural experiences;
  (2) Provision and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity;
  (3) Objectives, scope, and sequence of the content areas;
  (4) Students' responses.

Attitudes

- Genuine and sincere interest in the education of students regardless of their linguistic and cultural background; personal qualities that contribute to success as a classroom teacher.
- Sensitivity to biases and deficiencies in existing curricula as well as in commercial and teacher-prepared materials of instruction.
- Flexibility in teaching strategies and willingness to seek a match between students' needs and the teachers' objectives, methods, and materials.

attitudes. Selected and adapted primarily from guidelines developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics (1974) and by the National Council of Teachers of English (1976) for the preparation of teachers, these qualifications are relevant to *all three* groups of teachers that LEP students at the elementary and secondary school levels are most likely to encounter: (1) the regular mainstream or content area teachers of English-medium classrooms; (2) the bilingual teachers who instruct through the medium of the students' L_1 as well as English; and (3) the ESL teachers who focus on the development of the second language code. Training programs and credentialing requirements for the three groups are often quite separate, and I wish to argue that this should not be the case.

Teacher education for all groups requires *un*learning assumptions and misconceptions which can range from the simplistic notion that language differences in themselves are enough to account for the relatively low academic achievement of minority group students in our schools to the assumption that students who are competent in face-to-face social interaction have the language skills required for academic competence. The foundation for all programs should thus include knowledge about such topics as the interrelationships of language and cognitive development—from the classic work of Piaget and Vygotsky to recent contributions by Bruner, Cummins, Snow, and others who are active in this field—and about the processes of language acquisition and learning. Such a knowledge base is necessary because there are no "cookbook" approaches that are going to guarantee maximal academic competence for LEP students; the most effective teachers will be those who can adapt and modify curricula for students' special needs and cultural characteristics. This requires understandying *why* as well as *what* to do.

Training programs for specialists in ESL, which usually provide for the areas of knowledge I have listed, might come under the heading of "applied linguistics," but these programs frequently omit areas of knowledge that represent what the linguistics is supposed to be applied to, including the curricula of elementary and secondary education. The central message that I want to deliver here is that ESL teachers cannot contribute effectively to the development of LEP students' academic competence if the teachers do not know what academic content students are expected to learn. Teachers must also understand the developmental processes of reading and writing as well as of oral communication. Within each of the knowledge areas listed in table 1, the specific information and the relative depth of information a teacher must have depend on the level and domain of instruction, but knowledge in all areas is needed.

The teaching abilities listed in table 1 are most often included for regular classroom teachers under the program heading "language arts." A survey of recent textbooks in that field indicates that major emphasis is

indeed being placed on: (1) providing for different levels of cognitive and linguistic development; (2) organizing classrooms so that students can teach and learn from each other; (3) using language in critical thinking tasks; (4) enhancing metalinguistic awareness; and (5) integrating skill development with content area learning. Major progress has recently been made in research on reading and composition, and this is being reflected in language arts methods texts and courses. There are major discontinuities, however, that occur across training program lines.

Otherwise excellent texts for English language arts often include a page or two on what to do with LEP students in the classroom in case the school does not have an ESL or bilingual program, with suggestions that do not reflect current knowledge about second language acquisition. ESL training, on the other hand, often introduces reading (if at all) with overemphasis on decoding, as in the outdated Linguistic Method, without apparent input from current knowledge about the nature of reading comprehension and skills development. The best of what has been developed in English language arts could also be profitably applied in teaching other native language arts, but this latter component is generally neglected in bilingual teacher training except for teaching initial literacy.

It seems clear that most components of academic competence—including context-reduced language skills, strategies for learning, and the concepts which are learned—are either code independent or transfer quite readily from one language to the other. It seems equally clear that the qualifications needed by teachers to foster students' academic competence are essentially the same, whether they are labelled regular/mainstream, bilingual, or ESL. I am not the first to say "good teaching is good teaching," but that fact makes the statement no less important on this occasion. LEP students will ultimately profit most from the same kind of teaching excellence that benefits all other students. Program boundaries exist because of the different disciplines from which regular teaching, bilingual education, and ESL arise. I believe it is vitally important to synthesize our efforts both within the educational experiences of LEP students and across the educational programs that train teachers.

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